

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES  
OFFICE OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY



Transcript of an  
Oral History Interview with Elizabeth M. Bennett  
SHE.OH.001  
April 16, 2019

## **Interview Information:**

Interviewer: Ellen Brooks

Interview Location: Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Interview Runtime: 02:39:32

Transcribed By: Ellen Brooks, June 2019

Reviewed By: Ellen Brooks, July 2019

Collection: “She Changed the World” Oral History Project

## **Interview Summary:**

This oral history interview with Elizabeth Bennett, PhD covers her general life history with a focus on her career in math and science education and her role as the director of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. Bennett served as director from 1990 to 2012, and prior to that she had worked for the Triangle Children’s Museum and Discovery Place. She also held a variety of teaching positions for over eleven years.

Bennett was born and raised in Alabama, received her higher education degrees in Virginia (Hollins University and University of Virginia), and first moved to North Carolina (Chapel Hill) in 1972 after which she and her family moved between North Carolina (Charlotte, Davidson) and Virginia (Charlottesville). They eventually settled in Chapel Hill long term in the late 1980s.

In the interview Bennett discusses growing up in Alabama as an outdoorsy, active child. She talks about her high school and college experiences, early jobs as a teacher, and meeting and marrying her husband, Walter, a few months before he was sent to Vietnam in 1966.

Bennett describes why she became a teacher and what led her to eventually run for and win a seat on the school board in Mecklenburg County. Soon after being elected to the school board, she accepted a position helping to develop the Discovery Place, a science center in Charlotte. Bennett draws parallels between teaching in a classroom and designing exhibits and experiences to teach in a museum. Bennett received her PhD in Science Education from UVA in 1988. After working as a consultant for the Blue Marble Children’s Museum in Chapel Hill she accepted the director position at the Museum of Natural Sciences where she led the development of a reinvention of the museum, including a new building and new exhibits.

Bennett discusses the history of the Museum of Natural Sciences and some of her most memorable experiences as the director. She describes challenges faced, her leadership style, and her definition of success. She notes that taking her grandchildren (ages four and five at the time of the interview) to the museum is a great source of pride and joy for her. Bennett continues to be active as a volunteer at the museum, as well as involved on various levels with STEM education around the state.

## **Biographical Sketch:**

Elizabeth “Betsy” M. Bennett (nee McSpadden) was born on October 10, 1943 in Birmingham, Alabama to Louise Elizabeth McSpadden and Jack Dobbs McSpadden. She has a younger brother named Jack and an older sister named Alice. She attended Mountain Brook Elementary School (1949-1957), Mountain Brook Junior High (1957-1958), Shades Valley High (1958-1961), Hollins University (1961-1965; B.A. Physics & Mathematics), and University of Virginia (1970-1972; M.Ed. Science Education, and 1986-1988; PhD Ed. Science Education). Bennett married Walter Hartwell Bennett, Jr. in 1966 and the two have two children, Kelly and William. She was the director of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences from 1990 – 2012.

**Archivist’s Note:**

Transcriptions reflect the original oral history recording. Due to human and machine fallibility transcripts often contain small errors. Transcripts may not have been transcribed from the original recording medium. It is strongly suggested that researchers engage with the oral history recording as well as the transcript. Timestamps are approximate.

## **Interview Transcript:**

### **[Beginning of Bennett\_a]**

Brooks: Today is April 16, 2018, this is an interview with Elizabeth M. Bennett, former director of the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. This interview is being conducted for the North Carolina State Archives "She Changed the World" Oral History Project. The interviewer is Ellen Brooks.

So, thank you so much, uh, for talking with me today for our project. Um, we're gonna start really early. If you can tell me when and where you were born.

Bennett: Um, I was born in Birmingham, Alabama. On October 10, 1943, on my dad's birthday.

Brooks: Wow. All right. Um, so can you tell me a little bit about what you were like when you were growing up?

Bennett: Spent a lot of time outdoors, building forts, damming streams. We were lucky enough to, uh, live in, a house that backed up onto Lane Park, which was a park in Birmingham. It now has the zoo, the Birmingham Zoo. It didn't at the time. It just had a few animals. Um, but there were woods between our house and the park, so we spent a lot of times in the woods. Played baseball in my backyard, so spent a lot of time outdoors. My grandmother had a place in Mentone, Alabama, which is in the mountains of Alabama. And we went up there every summer, and, um, for a couple of months, and we were on the Little River. De Soto explored in that area and we would get up early in the morning and get in a canoe and go down the river. It was a real slow river so you could canoe back up. I just remember those summers has having no time -- no schedules, you didn't have to be anywhere, you could just play with the neighbors, my cousins lived down the dirt road. So, that's my memories of being outdoors a lot, I guess the strongest memories I have of my childhood.

Brooks: And you have siblings?

Bennett: I do. I have a younger brother named Jack and a older sister named Alice. And they were very much the same. You know. I went to summer camp in Mentone, just about ten miles from my grandmother's place. And mother would take us on adventures. Whether it was -- we would go to the beach some. Whether it was at the beach or in the mountains and we'd go exploring looking for arrowheads or just whatever we could find in the woods, so.

Brooks: And what did your parents do for a living?

Bennett: Um, well, my father was a, uh, insurance executive. He was Vice President of Liberty National Insurance Company. My mom, before she had kids, was a kindergarten teacher. But later in life she became an artist and a photographer.

And I remember the first show she had in Birmingham. Everybody bought - she didn't have any paintings left. So, uh, so I would say she's a teacher and an artist.

Brooks: Yeah. Did your parents grow up in Alabama?

Bennett: Yes. Both of them grew up in Alabama.

Brooks: Okay.

Bennett: My mother's family, my mother's, uh, mother, my grandmother was one of seven sisters. They were the seven Orr sisters. So, there was a long tradition there. We would have -- at Christmas, the Orr sisters would have family gatherings they would take turns hosting the family. And that tradition goes on still. Of course, they're not there but my sister hosts those Christmas events when it comes her turn. So yeah.

Brooks: That's really neat. Um, so, what kind of student were you, would you say?

Bennett: Um, I was a fairly good student. I, um, you know, was very interested, actually interested in school. But I was a very active child, so I didn't spend a whole lotta time studying out of school. I would much rather be outside. Um, but I did all right. My sister was the genius in the family. So, it made it easy for me not to be the genius. So, but I was always interested in science and math, um, from a fairly early age. So.

[00:05:04]

Brooks: And, um, what was your high school career like?

Bennett: So, I went to Shades Valley High School. It was the, um, only high school kind of -- it was the nearest high school to where I grew up. And my sister had gone there. And, um, I ended up going back and teaching there. So, uh, when I -- my sister was actually living in Brussels the summer after I graduated from college and I hadn't applied -- and I was gonna go spend the summer with her, and before I left for the summer I thought, "Well, I'll just go to Shades Valley and tell them I'd like to teach." I hadn't filled out an application or anything, and I walked in and the principle came out of the office, he said, "What can you teach?" and so I was hired right there. I didn't fill out an application or anything. They were excited that I would come back and teach at that school.

So, I had a very good experience there. I had great math teachers. I was not very good in languages, I had difficulty with French and Latin. So, I guess I was good enough student that when I walked in the principal's office they said "What can you teach? We'd like for you to come teach." [both laugh] So I went off for the summertime, to spend the summer with my sister, and then when I came back, they had me teaching chemistry. And I had majored in physics and math, my sister had majored in chemistry, and I said, "Teaching chemistry? I thought I was gonna be teaching math!" And I said, "My sister's the one that is the chemistry

major." Um, and they said, "Well, you start in three days." So they gave me the books and I did a lot of studying and first day of class I walked in and my cousins were in the class [laughing].

Brooks: Oh wow.

Bennett: And then they knew I wasn't the chemistry major. But it, it -- you know, I muddled through the first two weeks and then one of the math teachers resigned so they moved me from the chemistry class to teaching math and I was fine, that was fine. And, um, so -- so in my mind my high school experience actually continued to that first year of teaching that I had taught math, it was really cool.

Brooks: Was that your first, like, quote unquote real job?

Bennett: Yeah, straight outta Hollins. At Hollins I had taken practice teaching my senior year. So Hollins did have some opportunities, so I taught at Batatat [?] High, which was, I guess, about ten miles north of Hollins University, in Roanoke, Virginia. So I taught, um, physics there. And that was fun. Got my feet wet. I had a good -- there was a good mentor teacher there that I think he didn't want to teach the physics, so he just let me teach the class [laughing]. So, I had a good experience doing that.

Brooks: Yeah. Did you have any jobs growing up -- like, you know, little part time jobs?

Bennett: I -- in the summertime I was a camp counselor. So the church, Independent Presbyterian Church that my family went to ran a camp called the Fresh Air Farm. And it was for underprivileged kids. So I was a camp counselor in the summertime there. And that was great, that was right up my alley. I taught swimming. You know, I had -- it's interesting 'cause at age fourteen I had eleven eight-year-olds in my cabin [laughing]. And I remember, um -- I mean, that's a lot of responsibility for a fourteen-year-old.

Brooks: Yeah.

Bennett: And, you know, I did it several summers after that. And, um, and I remember taking them out and I'd tell 'em ghost stories. And they'd wait til -- you know, they loved that. So, um, and then I remember taking them out in the woods, not very far from the cabin, I mean maybe we went twenty yards, maybe thirty yards in the woods. We had our sleeping bags, not tents or anything like that. Tell 'em ghost stories. And I thought -- and they always had good endings, you know, they weren't totally scary and I remember them all kinda huddling around and I thought, "Maybe this isn't a good idea out here in the woods." But anyway, that was a really good experience. Lots of -- you know, you learn -- it's interesting when you're teaching camp you learn a lot of group dynamics. How you teach in a group and that helps in a classroom, and it helps -- all those skills help engage students in activities.

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I had a -- so after the first year of teaching, Walter and I got married. And he -- we went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma for a few months before he left to go to Vietnam. So I couldn't go back and teach at Shades Valley, 'cause I wasn't back in time to start the second year. So, um, so I guess he left in late September. And then -- so I got another teaching job at Berry [?] High School, which was not too far from Shades Valley but it was farther south out of Birmingham. And they had me, uh, teaching physics and biology. And I remember one of my students saying -- and Walter left for Vietnam -- and so he was gone a year so I was teaching at Berry High School while he was gone and, remember one of the students says, "I am flunking your course but this is my favorite class!" [laughing] and I said, "Well, we're gonna help you not flunk this course." You know, he said -- so, it was interesting. So, I really liked teaching. I like the students, I wasn't a biology major, I had to teach biology and a good friend of mine was a biology major and so I got her to come and volunteer - she was pregnant at the time - come and volunteer to help the -- I had taken a lot of biology so I felt -- and chemistry -- but I felt more comfortable teaching the biology, and she would come and help me dissect the worms and frogs and stuff like that, 'cause -- so, she was my intern that helped do that, 'cause it sometimes it's hard to identify what the insides of the frog are and everything.

Brooks: Yeah. [laughs]

Bennett: And she was really good at that. So, but anyway, my teaching experience was fun.

Brooks: Yeah. Um, so, just to back up so I have the chronology straight - you, um, where did you go to college?

Bennett: Hollins University.

Brooks: Okay. And how did you -- and that was in Virginia?

Bennett: Right.

Brooks: And how did you decide that that's where you wanted to go?

Bennett: Um, it was interesting, my mother went to all-female schools and she -- I remember my parents gave me the option of going to an all-female high school or an all-female college. And at the time I was just getting ready to enter Shades Valley and I said, "I'm not going to an all-female high school." Uh, and mother just thought that I would get a stronger education there, be more focused on studying and everything. So, I looked at my sister -- my mother went to Goucher, my sister was at Goucher, um, and so I looked at women's colleges. I looked at Goucher and was accepted there. But I went to Hollins and was very impressed with Hollins, they had a Hollins Abroad program which I was very interested in doing. So, um, so that's why I went to Hollins.

Brooks: Did you end up studying abroad then?

Bennett: No, because I was a physics-math major [laughs]. And they didn't --

Brooks: Oh no.

Bennett: --they do now -- they didn't have the curriculum that I could take. 'Cause the Hollins abroad program is a year. You go the middle of your sophomore year to the middle of your junior year and you stay over the summer. And I would've missed a whole year of my major and -- 'cause the schools that they had arranged for the students to go to didn't have the physics and math curriculum that I could take. So they've fixed all that now, and you can go in any subject. And I actually just met the new Hollins president last week, she was in town and she's doing great things at that University. So, but, it turned out that I was able to -- one thing about a small college - university, it was Hollins College then, it's now university 'cause it offers graduate degrees but - is that, you can explore any subject that even though it may not be your major.

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So, my junior year I decided I wanted to take creative writing. And so, I went to talk to Lewis Rubin, I don't know if you know him but he came here. He's just in the creative writing world. He has mentored many, many students and he was a fabulous professor at Hollins. Started the Creative Writing Program with John Allen. And, so I went to Lewis and I said, "Well, I would like to take creative writing but I'm a physics math major, is that okay?" And he said, "Sure." So, I was a junior, and most of the students were freshman and in my class was Lee Smith and Annie Dillard.

Brooks: Wow.

Bennett: And I remember - and Walter and I were dating then - and I remember telling Walter that I had these fabulous writers in my creative writing class, and he was an English major and he said, you know, "What do you know?" [laughs] And then, uh, you know, he met them. And Hollins had fabulous creative writing program. They would invite, um, guest writers to come and spend a year at Hollins. But, so, um, even though my focus was physics and math I was able to take creative writing and that was really pretty cool, I learned a lot. Met a lot of really good writers that are actually now here in North Carolina.

Brooks: So, I think it's a really interesting choice that your parents gave you, an all-girls high school or an all-girls college. Um. Can you talk a little bit about reflecting back on your experience? Do you think that it was a better education, or better circumstances, to be at an all-girls school at some point in your life?

Bennett: I think so. Uh. I -- you know, I learned an amazing amount at Hollins. I had the -- um, and again, I was not the student that stayed there all weekend and studied on



the weekends. I was traveling to men's colleges and - uh, but when I was at Hollins, I mean, I studied. And you didn't have a lot of distractions. I'm sure I stayed up too late, I mean, I studied late into the night during the week. And um, I don't know, it was a very comfortable -- you know, I made a lotta friends, you -- there was not a lotta pressure.

When I was on the school board at Charlotte-Mecklenburg I remember when we changed the grading structure slightly. And, uh, and students came and petitioned the school board about this change in structure because they'd been counting on it being one way and most of them were juniors and seniors, you know. Planning on going to college and everything. Most of these students were really excellent students that came and petitioned us. And their -- it changed their average so that it looked different on the transcript or something, and these students, they were doing sports, they were exceling in school, and talk about the tension in that room. And I thought, These kids at juniors and seniors in high school have so much pressure and what are we doing to our kids, you know, that they're feeling this pressure now. And these were excellent students. And I did not have that. I mean, it was expected on me to do well in school. You know, I did homework every night. Um, and it was expected of me to do well in college but there wasn't this - and so I did - but there wasn't this tremendous pressure that I see students under now. And I wonder how that translates into -- and a lotta of 'em go on to be success and everything, but I wonder, somewhere in their thirties or forties if they think they missed something.

And I feel like I didn't miss opportunities because of pressure. And, you know, there was a high expectation, but there wasn't the pressure that I actually see kids today under. I saw those young students when I was in Charlotte, under. And --

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-- um, I remember when I was teaching at Durham Academy one year after we'd come back. The first time we were in North Carolina, and Walter was a lawyer in Charlotte, and then we came back here, and I was teaching at Durham Academy one year. And a friend of mine was teaching the fifth grade and one of the fifth graders made a C on a test in her class and they started crying and saying they weren't going to get into college. And I thought, you know, What are we doing to these kids, you know? I, um -- I was just this fairly happy go-lucky kid that got to spend a lot of time outdoors. Um, and, yes, I was -- one reason why I liked Mentone, Alabama in the summertime so much 'cause there wasn't a schedule. You know, you had to eat dinner at six o'clock, you had to do your homework and all of that, but in the summertime, you know, it was just all this freedom. And I felt a good bit of that freedom at Hollins. You know, you had choices and Hollins had a really good curriculum. I remember the -- and I don't know if it's required now but my freshman year you had to take a year of humanities. Which was studying all -- going way back to Aristotle and kind of coming up to not even

quite modern day. And that was an eye-opener for someone that had been focusing on math and science. So, I felt like I had a really broad education that I needed. So.

Uh, and I didn't miss the co-education part because there's so many colleges around Hollins that, you know, you weren't isolated.

Brooks: Yeah. Well, since it seems to fit in the timeline, can you tell me how you met Walter?

Bennett: So, um, met Walter -- I think the first time I met him a friend of mine in Alabama was dating him. And then when I went to Hollins I was actually dating someone from Virginia. And I used to get him blind dates. And then my friend in Alabama, they stopped dating. And then long about, I think the end of my sophomore year we started dating.

Brooks: Okay, and then stayed together through --

Bennett: Well, it wasn't exclusive. You know. I, um -- you know, we dated other people during that time but yeah.

Brooks: Yeah.

Bennett: So it was pretty straight from then on.

Brooks: Yeah.

Bennett: And we got married in '66, which was the year after we graduated.

Brooks: Okay.

Bennett: And then he went to Vietnam, mm, let's see. We got married in June and he went to Vietnam in September. So, when you're twenty-two [laughing] you don't look at those situations very clearly. That was probably not a good decision. When you're twenty-two you think nothing's going to happen to you or your spouse and, um, so, uh, and his m -- course his parents were worried the whole time. And the interesting things about Vietnam is you saw it on CBS News every night. And so, his dad would get up really early before -- his dad was a professor at University of Alabama and his mother taught at Stillman College, which is the, um, black university in Tuscaloosa. And the, um -- and he would get up really early so that he could see the news before he went off to work. And, um, the -- but I, you know, I would go down to see them and try to reassure them that things were gonna be fine. But there was two months there where we didn't hear anything. You know, now when soldiers are in the service, they can email home and all that, but that was not going on in Vietnam.

But, um, he made it back safely. And he, interestingly enough, I think he left about two months before things really escalated. And, um, so when we went back to Vietnam - and of course it was my first trip - when he went back in 2013, we

had a Vietnamese tour agency run by a guy named Tony who had spent four years in the U.S. And then ended up going back to Vietnam to run this tour agency. So, you could plan your trip. You just had individualized trip. So, and a lot of Vietnam vets were returning to go to the places where they'd been. So, on our trip we went to this place called the Rock Pile, that he was supporting the Marines on top of the Rock Pile, it was a kind of a mountain jutting out in the middle of nowhere that overlooked the DMZ [Demilitarized Zone]. We went to Khe Sanh. You know, they still have airplanes and bunkers there and everything. So, um.

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But anyway, so I -- you know, that war was very public. And fortunately, he got out of there two or three months before it really got bad. But he was aware it really got bad. But he -- they only let you there a year, so.

And then, you know, after that we came here for the first time 'cause he was in English graduate school. Under Lewis Rueben. Who was the -- by then he'd migrated to Carolina. And I taught school while he was in graduate school.

Brooks: So, he was at UNC-Chapel Hill?

Bennett: Mm-hm.

Brooks: Walter was?

Bennett: Mm-hm.

Brooks: Um, so when you were majoring at Hollins and kinda figuring out what you wanted to study, did you have a vision for your career path or what you wanted to do with your math and physics degree?

Bennett: Well, I always thought I'd be a teacher.

Brooks: Okay.

Bennett: It was interesting, I thought I would be a math major and then I kept -- the more you get into math the more theoretical it gets. And I thought, Now why do you -- why do you need to know all of this? [laughing] And then I took a physics class and then I figured out, well, that's why you need to know all of this, 'cause it helps you figure out the world. It helps you understand how the world works. Or how everything works. So, physics is a lot of math and physics and stuff but I always [microphone scratch] thought I'd be a teacher. But, um, and maybe it's just 'cause my camp experiences and I knew I liked that kinda dynamic, working with kids. Um. And so, that's why I took practice-teaching my senior year at Hollins. And I loved the way they did it. They just, you know, they gave you prep about how you prepare for classes and, and, um, then I just went. And I probably had -- I had the mentor that I had at Batatat [?] High not wanting to teach the physics class. He just turned it over to me so I probably had more hands-on experience than other

young student-teachers had, you know. Often times they're just partnered with another teacher. I mean, he'd leave the room. And [laughing], so anyway.

We did experiments on the -- shot rockets, they made their rockets and then shot 'em off on the playing fields outside the school. And it was a lotta fun. It was a lotta fun.

Brooks: Um, was there anything, kind of unexpected from those first few years being an educator yourself?

Bennett: Mm. N- um, no. I think one of the unique experiences I had when I was teaching was when we were in Charlottesville, Virginia. So, the chronology was that, um, my first teaching experience was in Alabama, then we moved to North Carolina and I taught at Carrington Junior High School in Durham, then I taught at Durham Academy and then Walter decided he didn't want to get a PhD in English, that he wanted to go to law school so we moved to Charlottesville. And I taught at Buford Junior High School there. And I was teaching math. And they, um -- and the P.E. teacher quit. And they asked me, Would I take physical education. That they could find another math teacher but -- they, um, needed me to teach phys. ed. and that was awesome fun.

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And the reason why they asked me is 'cause I got to that school and I was teaching math and it was fine. And the girls had no after-school programs, in sports. The boys did. The girls didn't have any. And that was before Title IX and all this. So, I started the after-school sports program for girls. And we did soccer, and baseball, and, um -- so that -- when the P.E. teacher resigned, they asked me would I go teach P.E. And I said, "Okay, that sounds good." And so that was kinda one of the surprises I never thought I'd be teaching physical ed. but that was very fun. So that was one of my surprises.

And then another great opportunity that I had in Charlottesville was that the University of Virginia had gotten a grant to, um, work with, um, teachers. To train them to go into newly integrated schools and work with the teaching faculty of the high schools. So, my principle recommended me for that program. And so there were twenty of us. Uh, there were ten white teachers and ten African American teachers, male and female. So, there was a group of twenty of us. I think it was about twenty. Maybe eighteen. Eighteen or twenty of us. And we were, um -- you maybe call it sensitivity training. We were trained to one, learn more about each other first. And then, um, one thing I learned about -- one of the specific things I learned about was that the all-black schools often were much stricter than the all-white schools. I mean, that was just part of the culture. And so, when black students came into an integrated situation they were used to more discipline. And white students weren't. So, there was a different way in how you manage the

school and how did you work that system out so it worked for everybody, and all of that. So, we learned strategies like that. We did a lot of roll playing.

And then, we were sent into newly integrated schools in Virginia. Virginia had just -- Judge Merhige had a major decision so the schools in Virginia had just been integrated so we were trying to go into those schools and work with the faculty. And do the same thing with the faculty - 'cause the faculties were integrated. The concept was, if the teachers at the high school couldn't get along then how do you expect the students to get along and all this. So, the idea was to work with the teachers and give them some of the skills that we had learned, go through the same kind of training program that we had gone through, with those high schools. So that was another, um, eye-opener. That was a surprise. That was -- you know, a new experience. It was a great experience for me. And the lessons I learned that have just really carried over to, you know, ever since then. So that was another interesting opportunity I had.

And another experience back in North Carolina - I mean, yeah, back when I was teaching in Charlotte, before I went on the school board -- We, um -- and so that would have been after, after I had that experience when we came back to Charlotte. So, I taught at West Charlotte High School. And it was newly integrated. And I was taught -- I was paired with a teacher-friend of mine. And we were one teacher. I think we were the first split teaching job in North Carolina, I think that was the first time -- I'm pretty sure that's the first time at Charlotte-Mecklenburg that they had two people share one teaching position. And we taught at the Open High School, which was a segment of West Charlotte, within West Charlotte. And it was a very open curriculum. And she did, um -- I did math and she did biology and then there were some other teachers that taught the English and History, but she and I split the science and math.

[00:35:12]

Um, and so I was able to use those skills that I learned in Charlottesville in that new situation. And we did a lot of group -- I did a lot of group teaching with my students there. So, it's interesting how all that kind of -- those skills that you pick up in a school situation and you transfer to a work situation is really good.

Brooks: Why was that position split?

Bennett: Because we both had kids.

Brooks: Ah.

Bennett: And couldn't teach full time. And I didn't want to give up my teaching. So, I had - I think Will Bennett was nine months old when I went -- when I took that job. And Maggie Rae, my friend that taught with me, um, her son, Will, was maybe just a little bit older. And then she had an older daughter like I did. So, um, so both of us wanted to work part-time. So, we went to the principal and said can we

do this. And they said yes. And it -- and we were in this open experimental school, so they were trying a lot of different things. So, you know, it all worked out.

Brooks: Yeah. Do you remember how -- how it kind of occurred to you to ask for that?

Bennett: Well, Maggie and I were really good friends, because she and I co-chaired the Citizen's Advisory Group that integrated the Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools. So we had worked together for - I think that took about two years. To -- so when the school board had presented two pupil assignment plans that Julius Chambers took to the Supreme Court that were rejected. So, the citizens and the parents were looking for a way to stabilize the pupil assignment plan, the integration plan. Because, almost every year it changed, and their kids would go to another school. And so, there was a lot of unrest in Charlotte. So Maggie Rae, who had been in Charlotte, who grew up there and her husband was on the county commission and she asked me, she and I were good friends, would I help her bring a group of parents together from all over Mecklenburg County that -- so that you would - black and white so that you would have all points of view. And she said, "You know, Southerners don't fight over dinner. So, let's have dinner. And we'll have a dinner meeting at the school board and see if we can come up with a plan."

So, we went to the head of the school board with this suggestion, that we wanted to come up with a plan to present to the school board and they rejected us. Then we went to Judge McMillan, the federal judge, who had ruled on the case, and he gave a court order that our group, the Citizens Advisory Group, was to have access to all the pupil assignment records, and they should be given a year to come up with a pupil assignment plan to present to the school board. So, we did that. And we presented it to the -- and we had to present our plan back in Federal Court. And it was accepted, by the Federal Courts. So, that was a very intense time and Maggie and I got to be really good friends.

And we both had -- we both were teachers, we both wanted to continue teaching, but we just didn't feel like we could go full-time because we had these little kids. So, she and I cooked up the plan and then we went to Sam Hayward, who was the principle at West Charlotte. And he said, "Sure, let's give it a try." And somebody else had already started the concept of doing an open school within West Charlotte, 'cause West Charlotte, in the pupil assignment plan that was existing then, had nine -- I think this is right -- nine junior high school feeder schools into it.

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So, there was, um, there needed to be some cohesiveness and um, and so -- and I forget who headed up the open school initiative, but it was another -- it was a real strong educator. So, we had this concept of an open curriculum that we would try. Before that, I had, um, taught part time at the Street Academy. Which was, um,

small school, started out really small, for middle school dropouts. And, so I think we just had twenty. There were two teachers, a friend of mine Jane Quarry, and I taught there. And she taught the English and history subjects and I taught the math and science subjects. And so. And then the school system -- they sanctioned the school, then the school system sanctioned a bigger Street Academy with many more teachers. They sanctioned the concept and Jane and I worked that out and then they had a bigger concept.

And then I think I had Will, so I took some time off from teaching. And, um, and then, um, and then I ended up going to West Charlotte. And then that always -- that was getting too complicated and then I applied to Discovery Place and worked part time at Discovery Place which was the science museum in Charlotte, and it was just starting - it had not opened. So, I was hired before it opened to develop the physics and chemistry units of Discovery Place. So, I think I've got that chronology right. That -- oh, because when I went on the school board, I couldn't teach in the Mecklenburg schools anymore. And I still wanted to teach. And so, um, I started teaching in a science museum.

Brooks: So is that a -- I've never heard that kind of standard, if you're on the school board you can't be an educator or can't teach in the system.

Bennett: Mm-mh. 'Cause you would be in a sense employing yourself. And maybe the rule doesn't exist anymore. Um, but at the time I couldn't teach in the school system and be on the school board.

Brooks: So when did you get started on the school board?

Bennett: Okay, so on the school board I had, um, so it was after West Char -- after I taught at West Charlotte. So, um, somebody approached me, a school board member, Mary Lynn Hough [?], she was on the school board and she and her -- her husband was a pediatrician and they were moving to Asheville. So, she wasn't gonna run again. So Carrie Winter was already on the school board. And so, Carrie invited me just to come to lunch at her house with Mary Lynn Hough, just to talk about education stuff, that's what I thought. But, um, they -- and Mary Lynn picked me up, took me to Carrie's house, and then on the way home she said, "I want you to run for school board, I'm not gonna run. I'm not tellin' anybody now. And here's a check." And I said, "Oh, my." I said, uh, I said, "I've not thought about doing that." And she said, "Well go home, talk to Walter, call me tomorrow."

So, Walter and I talked, and I called her the next day and said, "Okay, I'll give it a go. You've gotta tell me what to do. [laughs] How do I do this? So. Then I ran for the school board. And was elected.

Brooks: And so then did you subsequently decide that -- I guess I'm curious about your decision to -- you knew you wouldn't be able to teach, so was that, like, a conscious decision of, I'm picking the school board over being in a classroom?

Bennett: Mm-hm. But and then it led me to Discovery Place. So that was interesting, I had, um, been asked by -- so I knew about Discovery Place. A friend of mine, Dennis Rash, asked me to help raise money for Discovery Place. And they were building this new science museum and there were lotta volunteers out raising money for the new science museum. So, I got involved with Discovery Place that way.

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And, um, so then I -- when I realized that I wasn't really going to be teaching and school board wasn't filling all my time, that's when I started looking around. And I had this wonderful lady helping me take care of the kids. And, so, I called a friend of mine at Discovery Place and I said, "You know, I'm interested in applying to Discovery Place to teach." And she said, "Well, you know, Discovery Place doesn't hire just anybody. What do you teach?" And I said, "Well, I teach physics, I can teach physics." She said, "Oh, why don't you come for an interview." So, I went for an interview the next week with Freda Nicholson, who's the director of the museum, and they hired me on the spot. To plan the physics programs. So that's how I got to Discovery Place so that was really cool.

Brooks: Can you talk a little bit about what Discovery Place is?

Bennett: Yeah. So, it's a lot like what the Museum of Natural Sciences is, although it doesn't -- it's not a natural history museum. It's got a natural history museum segment. So, um, Freda Nicholson was the director and she had started at the Nature Center. Which was a small nature center on Freedom Park in Charlotte. And they had exhibits, and they had outdoor activities that you could do. But it was a small place. And this was during the movement in the U.S. when people were building "science centers --"

Brooks: You put that in quotes.

Bennett: -- around the country. Yeah, in quotes because they saw themselves different than say, the Smithsonian, which is a natural history museum. Or, from the Field Museum in Chicago or the Natural History Museum in -- because they didn't have all these collections and they weren't doing research. They were just gonna teach science, and the Exploratorium was one of the first models, in San Francisco, where there was just this big huge warehouse and they had all these things you could tinker with and that you could do. So, um, so there was a movement in the U.S. to build these science centers to expose children to all areas of science: biology, chemistry, physics, engineering. And so, Discovery Place was quote the first big Science Center in North Carolina. So, when I applied, we were -- it wasn't open. We were planning the exhibits and they didn't have anybody to plan



the physics exhibits and so -- and so we were planning spaces where these activities would go on. And, um, so, that's what they hired me to do.

And then, you know, I stayed and taught in those areas. So, the three areas that I taught in was, the Energy Dome, and that had a cloud chamber, and it had a screen behind it where you would have video or images. So, I would dress up like Madame Curie in a black dress and a lace collar and go in and talk about how she discovered radium. And talk about the cloud chamber. And in a cloud chamber - and it was huge, it was a huge cloud chamber, maybe five feet by five feet - and it has all this vapor. And when electrons move through it, you can see the tracks. You can see the tracks. Anyways, it's just really cool, it's really cool. And usually we had a Cathode ray tube, so usually, my presentation would be using those instruments and talking about that discovery.

And then I worked in the chemistry lab. Which was an open lab, it was kinda like a kitchen. Had a funnel over it like you have over a stove, so it would suck the air out and I remember having to go and talk to the -- Freda said, "Well, we've gotta get this approved by the city." So, you -- to have this exhaust fan right there in the open. And I remember working with the city and saying, "You know, we have to have this is we're going to have this chemistry lab." Anyway.

[00:50:18]

So, I taught there, and I grew crystals. And some of them you can grow really fast under a microscope and the kids can watch. Um, and then, I also would do shows in the theater and because I didn't look like Michael Faraday I was Michael Faraday's assistant. So, I would do physics programs in the theater. And at one point I wrote a grant to -- that funded specialized programs in those areas. So, we had the great, intergalactic, scientific gameshow in the theater. So, we would make -- put bananas in liquid nitrogen and they'd freeze, and you could hammer in a nail with a banana. So, and they would come in and you would have an audience. I mean, the students would all be there, they'd come down, they'd volunteer, and they'd compete about who could hammer the nail in the fastest. You know, and other really cool things to do. So, that's what I did at Discovery Place. That was fun.

Brooks: What was it like --

Bennett: And that's what Discovery Place is like.

Brooks: Mm-hm.

Bennett: You know, you've got aquariums done on the bottom floor. You had a bird aviary. You had -- did have some collections. So, you could go in and see and they had classrooms, you know, hands-on. Some of which is -- you see in the Museum of Natural Sciences now. 'Cause it's -- I would say the Museum of Natural Sciences is a combination of being a science center and a natural history museum. 'Cause

when I go there, they had all these fantastic collections. Great staff, great researchers. Discovery Place didn't have the researchers doing ongoing research. It didn't have that department. Um, and -- but we also have interactive exhibits. And also, at the Museum of Natural Sciences, one thing that I felt like the public had to have the experience was talkin' to these researchers. And I didn't want research being something they didn't understand. They need to meet the scientists, they need to understand. So, you know, they've -- during that time we started the Citizen Science program, so now citizens get involved in programs at the museum.

You know, one of the coolest ones that Roland Kays does there now is the Camera Trap program, where you get a camera either from a library -- it's a state-wide program, it's funded, I think through an NSF [National Science Foundation] grant - and you can go to your library, your local library or you can come to the museum and get a camera on loan that you put up in your backyard. And I actually did this, I even retired from the museum, I put a camera down by the creek, down there. And it's heat-sensitive and movement-sensitive. So, when the animals would come down to drink from the creek the camera would take pictures of them. So, they've got these camera traps all over North Carolina, identifying what species are where, when. They're even putting them in urban communities now. So, they move from, kinda, the parks and the backyards into some urban communities. So, we are collecting -- and citizens are doing it, and they follow a protocol. And they send in their information. So, um, that's been a really great program.

And part of -- part of that was the reason why we did the Nature Research Center. Was so that people could have access to scientists and their research, whether it's in the genomics lab, whether it's in the biodiversity lab which is where Roland Kays, whether it's Lindsay Zanno's lab which is the paleontology lab. And you've got all those glass labs and the public can come in and talk to you and you've got the Investigate Labs where you can go in and do hands-on programs related to the research going on in those labs. BioGen funded the genomics activities in the Genomics Investigate Lab. So, I mean, or I think we call it the Microbiology Investigate Lab.

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So you're -- not only our scientists, but you're bringing university scientists in, expertise from organizations like BioGen that are helping develop the experiments so all of that. It's interesting how that all just kinda progressed from my experiences at Discovery Place and then landing up at the Natural History Museum. And learning, me learning so much from my research, so I thought, I shouldn't be the only one learning this. You know. All these kids need to talk to these folks that know North Carolina like the back of their hand. And where you

go to find salamanders, and, um, you know, so. That's kinda. It's interesting how it's all progressed.

Brooks: Yeah. Well, I'm curious about your starting at the Discovery Place and -- I mean, how did that feel kind of starting something totally new -- not totally new 'cause you've done education before but, you'd never built exhibits or worked in the public like that, so how did that transition feel?

Bennett: It was easy transition. It was totally, I mean -- I wasn't -- so I guess the way I saw Discovery Place and the way I saw the Museum of Natural Sciences is just a bigger classroom. We had more fun things to do. And it was interesting 'cause my kids had gotten older then, but sometimes you know, they'd have a teacher work day so they'd come to work with me at Discovery Place. And they knew all the intricacies of all those exhibits, so it was a great place for them to go. But, uh, it was just like a bigger classroom. It was seamless, it -- you know, doing the Michael Faraday show just seemed like another classroom, we just had more fun things to do. And, you know, you had -- course you had a lotta great people you were working with at the museum. And you collaborate on activities, you talk about who's gonna do what, and you work with the exhibits team to build exhibits that, um, facilitate the program. So, with a museum, little bit different from a school although schools are beginning to get more where the teachers interact and they plan - you know, they have these group teaching and it's a lot more integrated now than when I first started teaching. But in a museum, you have a whole staff planning what the many texture and opportunities -- experiential opportunities can be in the whole space.

So, you as the educator are working with exhibits people, and that was what was so creative and fun about building the Museum of Natural Sciences. Is that I had this totally talented staff, we brought in exhibit experts to help us take our vision and help us build the exhibits that, um, created -- for instance, when you think about the *Mountains to the Sea* exhibit in the main museum. Okay, so you had Mike Dunn and Alvin Braswell co-chairing - so we had sub-committees for the *Mountains to the Sea* exhibit, for the *Coastal North Carolina* exhibit, we had there were about ten or twelve people. And there were people outside of the museum on those subcommittees. Like, Dirk Frankenberg who was a marine biologist at UNC, chaired the *Coastal [North] Carolina* exhibit. You know, we had a lotta staff on that but we also had outside people. So the *Mountains to the Sea* -- so Mike Dunn and Alvin Braswell probably have been in every county in North Carolina. And they -- and the concept there was, in building that museum we felt like there were school children that lived at the coast that had never been to the mountains, there were kids that lived at the mountains that had never been to the coast, but they all came to the capital city, in the fifth grade and the eighth grade and whatever the -- and they could learn about their state just going through

these exhibits. So, um, and hands on experiences and programs that complemented what those exhibits were.

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So, we -- I had this -- I mean, I lucked up and got to a museum where you had these researchers, these educators that really knew North Carolina. And, um, so we -- so every committee had an educator and a researcher and more than one. And so, and the process was so creative. So creative. And we had, um, an exhibit -- we hired an exhibit firm that had built, you know, natural history museums all over the country, to help listen to us and sketch up our drawings and react to what they had done. And, and you just build the museum from the ground up, but we had all this talent in North Carolina. It's just amazing.

And the same for the new wing. The whole concept there was we want the public to be able to interface with the researchers. We're gonna have these glass labs, we're gonna have investigate labs that are glass that you feel like you can walk in and get involved however way you want to. With amazing exhibits. You know, the *Daily Planet* was to really highlight the special wonders of North Carolina and how we relate to the rest of the world. And so, you have a team of fifty to a hundred people working on all of this. Just totally cool. Totally cool.

Brooks: Um, and how long were you at Discovery Place?

Bennett: So, let me -- I think I was at Discovery Place five years. Five years. We left in '85, yeah, so we left Charlotte in '85 and I think I went there in '80. I was on the school board for six years and I think I was first elected in '78 and then, because I had these little kids, I was working part time, school board was taking more of my time. I didn't run the second time and then, um, I was reappointed when Phil Berry died, he was the chairman of the school board, so I was reappointed for another two years. So, I think that's right. I was at Discovery Place probably about '80 to '85. May have been '79 to '85. Was elected to school board in '78.

Brooks: Okay. And then --

Bennett: First time.

Brooks: And what was after? So, you moved out of Charlotte then --

Bennett: So, we went back to Charlottesville. So, we went back to Charlottesville for me to get my PhD and for Walter to get a master's in International Law. So, we went to Charlottesville twice, the first time we went, he was getting his law degree and I got my master's. And then the second time we went, he got a master's in International Law, 'cause he wanted to teach, he'd been a lawyer and a judge, and he wanted to teach and he felt like he needed to go back and get a degree. Another degree at Virginia. And then I got my PhD at the same time, while he was gettin' that. And so, and um --

Brooks: And what was your -- what's your PhD in?

Bennett: Science Education.

Brooks: Okay.

Bennett: But at Virginia they had -- I wanted to stay in North Carolina but the Education Program that they had at UNC was just not something that I wanted to do. And I applied to Harvard, was accepted at Harvard. And Harvard, you design your own program, so I met with the head of education at Harvard. And she actually was a friend of Jay Robinson who had been superintendent of schools in Mecklenburg County and he wrote her a letter and said, "You need to interview this woman, she's interested in coming to school there." And then, um, so I met with her and she said, "Well, come back tomorrow. I want you to come -- give me the program that you want to do." So, I went and met with the head of the science museum there in Boston, who I had met, and I said, you know, "I'm supposed to design my own program for Harvard. I wanna focus on sciences museums. Can I work with this science museum on my program?" And so, I designed that and went back and told her what I was gonna do.

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Anyway, the thing about the University of Virginia was you had some education courses, and, um, but I could take more science courses. So took more chemistry, I took more biology. I took meteorology, that was totally cool. And, uh, took astronomy. So, UVA had this great program where the majority of what you took were in your field. Then you -- one of the courses I had there was fabulous, it paid off when I was the director of the museum, taught by Dr. Comfort [?]. He said, you know, when you're leading an organization there's the formal structure that you have to deal with, the hierarchy that you have to deal with. But then there's the informal structure. And there was a book written about it that was our textbook. And the informal structure is understanding what people in the organization are thinking and talking about, the grape vine. So, the museum had a grape vine. You know, so it's being attuned to the politics really, of the institution. Not just the hierarchy. And understanding that you've got to know what everybody in your institution is doing. Whether they're the security guard, greeting people at the door, or whether it's your researcher or your educator and so that was a course that I took at UVA. Another course that I took that really, you know, paid off when you're leading an institution, because boy are they right, if you don't get both sides of that right - you know, you work within the hierarchy but you sure better know what the informal structure of your organization, who the leaders are, who the staff leaders are, and make sure they're on your team and all of that. So. It's cool.

Brooks: Um, and then after the PhD --

Bennett: So, after the PhD, so, um -- I -- so Walter's program, Environmental Law, that took him one year. And he, um, and -- to get my PhD, I already had my master's, it took me two years and then I left without finishing my dissertation and I finished that here. So, he commuted. So, he got his degree in International Law and then he got a teaching job at the law school here at UNC right after that. So, I was still in Charlottesville with the kids and finishing my work and teaching part time. And, um, he was here. So, I stayed up there one more year. And then I came back and decided not to take a job immediately because I needed to finish that dissertation so I would get my PhD.

And so, I spent, kinda that first semester here, in the library at UNC, finishing my dissertation. So, I sent that up and I went and I defended my dissertation. And I got that. And then -- and I remember Dr. Thompson said, "Do you know what the percentage of people that leave campus that haven't written their dissertation [laughs] is in getting their PhD?" He said something like only ten percent get their PhD if they leave without having written their dissertation. I said, "No, I'm glad I didn't know that." So anyway, so I spent, you know, that first year here. And then, um, and then I worked part time starting a children's museum which we called the Blue Marble, here in Chapel Hill. And now that's evolved to being the Kidzu Children's Museum. But back then, um, I forget -- I think Walter read about it in the papers, I forget exactly how that all started. But, um -- so I was hired as a consultant to help start a children's museum here. Alexander Julian was the major funder there, but there were a lotta people that I later worked with at the Museum, Ann[e] Smith, Hiya Catchetorian [?], Frank, um, architect, Harmon, Steve Wainwright, he was at Duke. So, we brought this group of about fifteen, twenty kind of scientists, educators, artists, all together to conceive of a children's museum.

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And we called it the Blue Marble. Thinking about what the earth looks like from space. So, I worked on that. And then, um, started lookin' for a full-time job. My kids were older then, they were both in school and applied and got the job at the Museum of Natural Sciences.

Brooks: And, um, was that -- I don't know the chronology of the Museum, was the Museum -- did the Museum exist already?

Bennett: Okay, so the Museum of Natural Sciences is 145 years old.

Brooks: Okay, so it did exist.

Bennett: Yeah, so the Museum of Natural Sciences was -- it used to be called the State Museum because it was the first museum funded by the state of North Carolina and it did art, history, science. Mostly science. And it was a -- started off as a natural history museum and it was pre the history museum and pre the art

museum. Which were established later and fort -- North Carolina was fortunate that the two Brimley brothers from England landed in North Carolina and H.H. Brimley was the first director and his brother C.S. Brimley was the first scientist. They started the collection of the Museum of Natural Sciences. And it was under the Department of Agriculture. At that time there were only four departments in state government, and the only logical place to put the museum was under the Department of Agriculture.

And so, uh, they knew what natural history museums in England looked like, and they knew what this natural history museum -- so they started the collections program. They started the science program. They were -- it was formed as a museum, so they had -- I'm not sure they had quote educators. You know, they built exhibits, they knew to build exhibits, they knew it needed to be based on the natural history of North Carolina. And they really got that museum off to a fantastic start. And the quote -- H.H. Brimley's quote that we all say now is that "a finished museum is a dead museum." So museums are never finished. So, prior to the time I got there, there were some great -- there was a great succession of directors.

And Harry Davis was there during World War II. And one of the -- just had a conversation with a Japanese colleague, one of the things that happened before World War II is that an American missionary in Japan came back home and was really distressed about the relationship between the U.S. and Japan deteriorating. So, he sent 12,000 dolls, American dolls to Japan. One for every kindergarten. And then the Japanese government responded by sending fifty dolls to the U.S., one for every state and then one for New York City and one for Wa -- D.C. And we got the Japanese doll because we were the state museum. And Miss Kagawa has a long history with the museum now, she was the only -- or one of the few dolls not taken off display in World War II. And Harry Davis put a sign saying, We know the people of Japan and the people of the U.S. want to be friends, it's just the leaders don't want to right now. And, so, anyway, Miss Kagawa, when the Japanese doll society found out that Miss Kagawa was gonna go into a new museum, they came and picked her up, took her back to Kagawa, which was the prefecture that she was from, and they refurbished her and invited me and niece to come over to the ceremony to give her back so that we could give her back to the museum.

[01:15:11]

There're all these historical tangents, the museum, whether it's Miss Kagawa or whether it's the unbelievable documentation that we have of the natural history of North Carolina, all the way from the reptiles in the Triassic period that are right here in Raleigh, that we found, the Rocky Assukid [?] that was found that's 250 million years old, to the plants and animals that live here. Um, so we have -- so when I got to the museum it had a fabulous collection, it had a great staff, they

just needed a new museum. 'Cause we were in the old agriculture building, we were still in agriculture at the time. So, when I first came to the museum Jim Graham was head of agriculture, probably. The second -- the most popular politician, second only to the governor. And, um, so, you know, we had this real strong foundation, we just needed a new museum. So that's what they hired me to do.

Brooks: Wow. And was the space already planned out, in terms of where the museum was going to be placed?

Bennett: Yes, so when I got here. They had already [laughs] -- they had already planned out where the museum was gonna be. They already had the architectural concept. But they had been through four exhibit designs. They didn't know what the exhibits were gonna be. And the director prior to me - the reason why there is a hole in the ceiling of the second floor that goes to the third floor was he was gonna have an African water hole there. Put all these African animals in there. And I remember asking the staff, "I thought this was the museum of natural -- the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences. Why are we planning an African water hole?" And they said "Mm. We just -- the director thought that we needed --" and I said, "Let's start all over."

So, I guess the first few months that I was here I took some of the key staff members and we visited the Smithsonian and we visited other natural history museums so they could get an idea of what we could be. And then I brought in an exhibit designer, well, Tom Trolla [?] was the architect of the building. Brought him in to lead a charrette. A two-day charrette to bring in -- that some staff members, it had community leaders, it had some other museum colleagues that I knew, to come in and plan what the exhibits for the new museum oughta be. And I'll show you that document. And then I had a -- Lucy Hagan [?] that had been on the board of the Blue Marble, to write it all up in the form of a book. Because we were gonna have to go to the general assembly to get money from the museum.

So, we, um, spent those two days. And we planned the *Mountains to the Sea* exhibit, the *Coastal [North]Carolina* - so eighty-five percent of what's in the new museum, the main museum today, was planned in that two-day charrette. It was a very powerful experience. We had a lot of input from people that understood North Carolina, that understood museums. And, um -- so we started all over with what exhibits oughta be in there. And so, what you see today, a lot of it was planned in that two-day charrette. What we didn't know was, um, the *Acrocanthosaurus* that walked into our life. We hadn't planned for the big dome. That actually was gonna be a tropical connections gallery and we were gonna have butterflies and birds, hummingbirds in there, and that now moved up to the fourth floor. But I got a call about two years before we were to finish the museum from one of my major donors. Actually, David Nimocks who, uh, was head of, um, who funded the Arthropod Zoo.



[01:19:55]

Anyway, and he called and said, "Are you gonna bid on the dinosaur named Sue?" And I said, "I hadn't thought about bidding on the dinosaur named Sue. I've got about four million dollars to raise and my understanding is that dinosaur is gonna be very expensive." And he said, "Well, you outta think about it." And he was head of Terminix and Terminix had funded the Arthropod Zoo, and I said okay. So I called John McMillan who was President of Friends, I said, "What do you think? Should we go bid on the dinosaur name Sue? The auction is Saturday, this coming Saturday." David, I think, called me Monday. And he said, "Well, how much is a dinosaur like that gonna cost?" And I said, "Well, Dale Russell," our senior paleontologist, "said it might be as much as seven million." And he said, "Well, why don't you make a few calls."

So, I did. And we, um, raised 7.2 million in a few days from major supporters. And John McMillan and Ann[e] Smith and Joyce Fitzpatrick and Dale Russell and I all flew to New York. And we bid on the dinosaur named Sue. When we walked in the door, Sue Hendrickson, the woman that found Sue, ran up to Dale and gave him a big hug, and he said -- and he was really expected within the paleontology community - and [s]he said, "I hope your museum gets this dinosaur." And the Smithsonian dropped out at about two million, uh, at five million, when we bid five million the whole group there cheered because there were people up in these hidden away rooms. And they thought a private donor was gonna buy Sue, and the people on the floor wanted it to go to a public museum. And then we dropped out at 7.2 million. And then the Field Museum got Sue at 7.8 million. And people were happy 'cause it was a great public institution. And while we were there, we met the owner of the Acrocanthosaurus and they said, "You don't want a T-rex. They didn't live in North Carolina. You want an Acrocanthosaurus, they roamed North Carolina. Why don't you come see our specimen? We have the only specimen in the world."

So, John McMillan and Dale Russell and I flew to South Dakota. And the skull is perfect, it's even got a dinosaur tooth in its jaw that it was eating. And Dale said, "Oh, this is the dinosaur for North Carolina." So, so, we -- the people that helped fund -- that were willing to pay for Sue were also willing to pay for, um, the Acrocanthosaurus, and the exhibit. So, the Acrocanthosaurus was three million and the exhibit cost a million. So, then we had to redesign two years out, that space. And I kept thinking, We need to put it in the geology, we need to make it scary and under the waterfall in that cave. And they kept saying, No, Betsy, this needs to be in the dome. It's your signature exhibit. So, we flew to California to see the exhibit designers and mocked up what the exhibit oughta be like, which is what it looks like now, and I said, "Okay, ya'll win, ya'll are right. We'll put the dinosaur there." Which meant we had to move the *Tropical Connections exhibit* up to the fourth floor, right there by the cafe. You know, where all the butterflies

are. We did have hummingbirds in there, I don't think they do now but --and put the dinosaur down in the *Acro Dome*. So that's the only kind of major change to the exhibit design that we did, from that original charrette. But that was cool. I'm glad we did. [laughs]

Brooks: Yeah, you can't foresee that type of thing --

Bennett: No, you don't.

Brooks: --necessarily. Yeah.

Bennett: And you do need to be flexible to incorporate those opportunities and, um, so we had to do some redesign, but it all worked out, which is great.

Brooks: How did you -- and maybe it wasn't just you -- but how did they idea for the charrette come about? And talking with the community?

Bennett: Um, I did know that that was -- and Tom Trolla [?] who was a fabulous designer, who designed the main museum, I think it was his suggestion, but I did know that it was something that we needed to do. But that's a fairly frequent exercise when you're building new museums. And so, he had been through that, and he led it. And was really good at that. And he knew how to engage and get ideas from all the different people.

[01:25:15]

He led -- also led the charrette for the new wing. 'Cause at the time he was the designer of the new wing. He ended up not designing the new wing 'cause state construction selected another architect. But, um, and he led another one. And that was really good. Again, we brought in community leaders. We brought in legislative leaders - by then they were very invested in the museum. Staff members and what -- and it's interesting, we didn't know where the -- where things would go. What I knew was that even though we were a natural history museum and we had research, and even though we have an exhibit on the second floor that talks about the research behind the museum, people could come to that museum and not realize the research -- all the -- and we had the Naturalist Center on the fourth floor that gave you some ideas of what was in the collections. They could leave the museum and not know all the research behind and there were researchers at the Museum.

So, it's actually -- and we did a strategic plan, and what do we need to do. One of the things was get across North Carolina more. One was to build a research lab. Um, or -- actually that came with the main museum, we built a research lab, 'cause we couldn't house the collections in the basement of the museum anymore 'cause they're stored in alcohol and it was a safety issue in downtown. So, we built the research lab out on forty-five acres, out there just past the art museum. And then we -- part of our plan was to make an outdoor education area there, which

became Prairie Ridge. That was part of our master plan. But another part of the master plan was a strategic planning, was to build a structure that would expose people to the research going on at the museum. And in universities. So, we had another charrette to plan the wing. And we were talking about -- and I was talking about 35,000 square feet, 'cause we'd just opened this brand new museum. And I thought oh this is gonna be donor fatigue. They're gonna say why are we doing this.

That group said, No Betsy -- And I was gonna focus on dinosaurs because there was so much interest, and they said, No, it needs to be about everything. It needs to be bigger. We talked about putting it out the research lab and they said no, it needs to be in downtown Raleigh, it needs to be across the street, behind the museum. And, so out of that charrette came -- and we had, like, four different plans. For the -- one of the bridge was from the main museum to the new wing was in the shape of a dinosaur. Kinda like that *Acrocanthosaurus* up there. But all of that, you know, eventually evolved. The *Daily Planet* originally was gonna be inside the building, but then we changed architects and it popped outside of the building because of space. So, the new wing ended up being 85,000 square feet. And you see what it is today. And -- but again the emphasis was on the research that goes on in North Carolina, not just at the museum, but at universities, and other researchers that are studying all aspects of the natural history of North Carolina.

Brooks: And when was the new wing added?

Bennett: So, the new wing opened in 2012. The main museum opened in 2000. In April of 2000 and in April of 2012, um, we, um opened the new wing. And again, just another round of creative, a lot of creative people. Andy Merriell was the exhibit designer that we hired. Curt Fentress was the architect that ended up building the new wing and he's the same architect -- it was his firm that built the airport. The new part of the airport.

[01:30:13]

And, um, and again, you know, we had multi-media experts from New York that helped us with all the multi-media that's in the Nature Research Center. And they helped with programming the *Daily Planet* and that spectacular multi-media show that you see was developed by multi-media experts out of New York. Linda Batwin, her company, so, Batwin & Robin, I think they call the company. And, uh, so, and you bring in exhibit experts that can visualize and create your ideas. And of course, I -- the exhibit staff at the museum is fantastic. And Roy Campbell heads up that exhibit, very creative, we're so fortunate he was there. And he, um, knew how to work with these exhibit designers, 'cause a small exhibit staff can't build a whole museum. So, you've gotta bring in people from the outside. And we

just got some of the best in the country to come help build that museum. Just totally cool.

But again, the whole staff was engaged. Um. And, you know, from the security guards to the researchers to the educators to, um, the administrators - you just got to -- because you've got to look at every detail. How does the -- when the visitor - - or what is the first visitor experience? And I always say, you know, when you're building a museum, you want wow and you want educational depth, and then you want them to leave with something that they can do afterwards. So, you've got to cover those three areas if you're gonna have a successful museum. You gotta wow 'em when they come in the door, you've got to have interactive educational experiences for them that you can get on the kinda the first level, but then you've also gotta have a deeper level that they can go into. And then you need a way for them to continue their experience once they leave the museum. So that was kinda the whole premise. How you design it.

Brooks: Yeah. And how long were you the director there?

Bennett: Twenty-two years.

Brooks: Wow.

Bennett: Most fun job in North Carolina.

Brooks: Yeah?

Bennett: Mm-hm.

Brooks: Um, well I do wanna talk more about your role as the director and also, like, kind of the work you've been doing since then. But I feel like now might be a good time to reflect on some more broad questions about your career, if that's okay.

Bennett: Sure.

Brooks: Um, and so this could apply -- you know, you could be thinking about your job as director but if it applies to some of your earlier work that's fine. But -- so I guess I'm -- one thing I'm kind of curious about is challenges you faced. And if there are any significant obstacles you had to overcome at any point in your career.

Bennett: Um, well, I think the challenges -- when you're building an institution in a fairly structured environment like state government, you -- I think the challenge is to get all the stakeholders invested in the museum. The, you know, at the -- when I first started out, I was working in the Department of Agriculture, so I needed to get the support of the commissioner and, you know, all the people working in the department. Then we were seeking appropriations from the General Assembly, so I worked with my board, the museum's board in garnering support for the museum in the General Assembly. But before, you know, it goes to the department you've gotta go get support from the governor and it needs to be in the

governor's budget. Then, and you know all this, and then you've got to get support from the General Assembly. So, part of the challenge is to get all those stakeholders to buy into the vision that this is something that really needs to be done and it needs to be done well. And the -- when I got there, the state of North Carolina, the governor and the General Assembly knew that they needed a new museum of Natural Sciences 'cause there were kids lined up, you would see 'em on the sidewalk lined up out of the door at the old museum, trying to get in.

[01:35:14]

And so, they'd already decided there needed to be a new museum. And so, my job was to, um, make sure that we built the best museum that we could. That the state of North Carolina would be proud of. We just didn't want an oh-hum, an average museum, we really wanted something spectacular. So that was a challenge, but it was -- you know, people got excited. Donors got excited and basically, they said - I remember telling them that we had these exhibit plans and that exhibits would probably cost, we first started at eight million, then sixteen million, it ended up being twenty-four million. So, I had to get that cleared, you know, through state government. Also, the board of directors, the Friends board, and with support from the advisory commission members. Needed to know that we needed to raise all this -- we needed to raise twenty-four million outside of state government. Um, that the state government was going to pay for the building and some of the exhibits, but we had to raise the rest of that.

So, I think -- and the Museum of Natural Sciences had never had a capitol campaign before. A major capital campaign. So, they'd never been out on the fundraising trail to raise this kinda money. So, I would say, you know, that was one of the big challenges. And then -- but people got excited. I remember Senator -- well I remember, Dan Blue, actually I think it was before he was senator, I think he was Speaker of the House at the time - he had this -- was over in the legislature with one of my board members and, um, on Dan Blue's door there was this scroll of names and all the fifth graders in this one school had signed their name, at the top it says, We need a new museum of natural sciences. It was totally cool.

And so, you know, I think that was a challenge, was just to get everybody to buy into the vision. What this could be. And to not disappoint. And we didn't. And, um, so.

Brooks: What -- can you talk a little bit about how you met that challenge? Like, what were some of your strategies for getting people to buy in?

Bennett: Um. Well, I think part of it is to give them entree into the vision. So, you meet with them and you say this is what it can be. These are the stories that we can tell. We need to tell the story - the natural history of North Carolina. You know, this is for the school children, it's for all the families, this is our heritage. It was not a

hard sell. You know. People, they could get the vision. And there were major donors that, you know, stepped up. Progress Energy gave a million dollars to the initial campaign. SAS, it was their first public million-dollar gift that they gave to the Museum of Natural Sciences. And you were talking to engineers and scientists and SAS statisticians and they understood the value of why you need a strong science museum. And then we had all these other models in the country, you know, so they knew what it could be. You know, Discovery Place being one of those models. And, um, so it was not a hard sell.

And you just, um, I remember, um, was in a meeting where we were briefing Governor Hunt about the progress of the museum. He was governor at the time, and Governor Martin was governor when I came to the museum and I knew him actually from Davidson times, from times when we lived in Davidson. But, um, the -- in that meeting I had to tell Governor Hunt that the museum wasn't going to open in September of '99. That it was gonna need to open in April of 2000 and he said, he looked at me and he said, "Betsy, we are not gonna move this date one more time." And I said, "Yes sir, we're not. We're not." So, you know, so meeting the deadline of being open on time. And I had this, you know, philosophy that you wanted the museum pretty much finished when you opened. You wanted people to be wowed by the whole experience.

[01:40:06]

So that was a real challenge, you know. A lot of us - to the day before we had the first grand opening were putting carpet tiles on the floor, you know, board members, staff members. You know, so it -- and the, um, *Tropical Connections* gallery wasn't totally finished, that was the only part of the museum that wasn't totally finished. 'Cause we'd had to move it, you know, from the *Acro Doom* to up there. Um, but, and we had the first twenty-four-hour opening of a museum in the state. And, uh, so I remember standing on the balcony of the museum at two in the morning, no way I was gonna get much sleep that night. And 45,000 people came to the opening. In that twenty-four-hour period. And I mean, it was just totally awesome.

So, you know, the -- and the expectation level was high. So, the challenge was getting everybody invested but it was not a hard sell and then the challenge was executing and getting it done and opening it on time. And the governor was the first person to enter the museum. We all walked down from the -- we did a march, we had activities out on the mall and we marched down from the mansion with the governor leading. And he walked into the museum holding the hand of - I think - a six-year-old Vietnamese refugee. I thought that was -- oh, this is just totally cool. And then everybody followed him into the building. It was just awesome. So. But, you know, so -- and I would say most of the challenges were what I would call required positive energy. There weren't a lot of naysayers. You know, there were times when you, um, are dealing with what I call negative

energy but both the main museum and the new wing, it was just a lot of garnering of positive energy and people catching the vision and understanding why we had to do this. So.

Brooks: And, um, I think you've touched on this a little bit throughout but I'm wondering about your perception of what it takes to be a leader, um, in your career but in general, like, what qualities do you think lend themselves well to leadership.

Bennett: Um, I think, um -- I think one of the things that I felt important for me to do at the museum was be a facilitator. Um, you know, my style of leadership was facilitating my staff getting their jobs done, making their jobs easier. You know, raising the money so that we can accomplish -- that's part of the - I call that part of the facilitation process. I think, having passion for what you're doing, and I was totally invested in the museum. And, um, you know, just being enthusiastic about that. And so, I guess passion. Being a facilitator. You do a lot of listening. And, also, bringing real creative smart people on your team that have the expertise to execute. And you know, there were -- like I said before, when I got to the museum there was fantastic collections, great staff, and so if you facilitate a great staff doing their job they're gonna bring in the people that they know they need to get the job done. And we made some really good hires, I had a great management team that had expertise in science or creating exhibits or educators, you know, one of my good friends and the Head of Education, Mary Ann Brittain just died recently but she was an extraordinary educator. She knew how to teach in groups. She had passion for the out-of-doors. She knew how to get people invested in insects as well as birds. And the environment that they require to -- and there's a lot of those people at the museum now, that -- Lindsay Zanno, you're going to get to meet her, I mean, she's just awesome. And her -- the research she's doing in paleontology and finding these new species and she's -- the research is amazing and she's a good explainer. And one of the things we wanted to was hire researchers that also were really good at talking to the public. That were doing great research. And that doesn't always come in the same package.

[01:45:31]

So. You know, and we did -- we spent a lotta time planning. And the whole museum staff was invested in the success of the museum. Same with the, you know, new wing. So, I think those are the strategies that I incorporated. And vision, you gotta have the vision. You gotta know where you're heading. And I did know what a new, good Natural History Museum oughta look like.

Brooks: Yeah. Do you have a favorite other museum around the country?

Bennett: Um, oh, there are a few. The Monterey Bay Aquarium is an aquarium but it's one of the cool museums. The Natural History Museum in New York is an amazing place. And they've re -- they've done a lot of work there to reinvent themselves, and reimagine themselves, and we got a number of their traveling exhibits to

come to the Museum of Natural Sciences. Discovery Place is still one of my favorite places. So. And 'course the Natural History Museum in London is cool. And the one in Paris is cool. So.

Brooks: [laughs] Um, so, because of the nature of this project, the She Changed the World, we're obviously talking to women. Um, and, I'm curious about your thoughts on women, especially in the STEM fields. And how - science, technology, engineering, math - and how, you know, it has been said that those are areas that women aren't necessarily strong in, um. Just any kind of reflection you have on that. Even if it's like, No, I don't think about it. I don't agree.

[both laugh]

Bennett: Right. Um, you know, I just -- I think women have brought a new dimension to science. I think they have opened up the thinking. I certainly -- in many ways they've -- science is now so collaborative. And you don't get major grants unless you're collaborating and I think -- obviously I think women are equally as intelligent, they can conduct the same level of research in the STEM fields. I do think they bring that added dimension of collaboration and there are a lot of male scientists that collaborate too now. But I do think they've opened up the field of science so, letting the public in to view their research. So, I think that the STEM fields have been enriched because more women are going into them now.

Brooks: Did it ever occur to you throughout your career that you were doing something that wasn't typically --

Bennett: Uh, I got that indication when I was the only physics major at Hollins College [laughing]. Uh, that's not true anymore, but, so I knew that, um, maybe it was a little bit different. I didn't dwell on it at all, my sister was a chemist. And, you know, I grew up being told that you can do whatever you would like to pursue. So, um, so I -- I'm glad that there are more women in the field now. It was kind of lonely being the only physics major at Hollins, but I had great teachers, so.

Brooks: Why do you think that was? Why do you think you were the only one?

[01:50:00]

Bennett: I just -- there were, I guess back in my day there weren't very many women interested in going into the -- into physics. More in biology, a little bit less in chemistry and not very many in physics. And I don't know - I guess sometimes people think it's gonna be harder. You've gotta have a lotta math to understand physics. But also, I mean, you're curious about the world, you know, just kinda tells you how the world works. To me it just explained why I was learning all that math.

[both laugh]



Brooks: Um, do you have a favorite program or exhibit or anything that you put together that really stands out in terms of --

Bennett: Um, well, I'm not sure I would say favorites. You know, the -- I still walk in the museum today, and I took my grandchildren there three or four weeks ago, and you know, the things that -- looking through their eyes that are so impressive, obviously the dinosaurs. They're four and five and so they're into dinosaurs. But also, the *Mountains to the Sea* exhibit, you walk in there and you see the waterfall and just that great space. And then when you walk into the *Daily Planet*, the SECU *Daily Planet*, and you see all those visuals. It still amazes me that we were able to do that. And I love the *Window on Animal Health*, when the veterinarian and the vet-terns are in there doing small surgeries on the animals. I love going by and checking that. And the Investigate Labs in the Nature Research Center. You know, I've been to numerous events on the first floor of both the main museum and the Nature Research Center, and I still see people's reaction as they come in and they just go, Wow. So. That's pretty gratifying and I -- when people say, Oh, you worked at the Museum of Natural Sciences? I say, "Yes, it's a real special place." And I really think that.

Brooks: Um, can you tell me a little bit about your decision to step down?

Bennett: Well, um, it was hard. I didn't want to leave. But, um, I had been going, you know, working sixty to eighty hour weeks for quite a while and it was just time. I think you know when it's time. And, you know, I also had promised my family that -- especially Walter that, you know, I'd get this new wing built and that we then would have some time, 'cause he had already retired. And, um, my daughter got married in that year, 2012. And she had a baby on the way. So, you know, there were lotsa personal reasons why I needed to not be spending sixty to eighty hours a week at the museum. But I sure miss it. Still miss it. I miss the people the most. And I go back there and help some, so, you know, I'm not totally -- but after I left I stepped away for two years, 'cause it's -- you know, the new director needed to come in and have his space and everything. But, you know, I keep up with the museum and it's still -- I'm still passionate about its success. And I was so happy to see that, you know, when we opened the Nature Research Center we had 1.2 million visitors and we were the most visited attraction in North Carolina. And we still are. We got that rating this year. So that is pretty cool. That's really pretty cool.

Brooks: That's amazing.

Bennett: Yeah, it is amazing. It is amazing, from this small museum that had a tremendous history and great collections to now being the most visited attraction in North Carolina and we're ranked in the Top Ten Natural History Museums in the country. So. That's pretty cool.

Brooks: That is. Um, and what do you -- how do you fill your time these days, mostly?

Bennett: Um, so, I do some volunteer work. But I'm employed part-time with Capital Development Services. I'm a strategic council.

[01:55:10]

For them. And I've had a number of clients. Right now, my major client is [Dorthea] Dix Park. And that is another great project that's gonna happen in the capital city of North Carolina and I'm working with some of the very same people that helped build the museum. Jim Goodman is chairman of that board and WRAL [local news station] was a big support of the museum during my time there. Um, and, um, you know, so I'm still -- and I'm helping with strategic fundraising for Dix Park. We had -- we were charged with raising - Capitol Development Services - we needed to raise eight million dollars for planning, and we raised eleven. And we're about to launch into a major campaign to raise the money to implement the master plan that was just approved by the city council. So, I'm still doing some of the same things. Working with a lot of the same people that helped build the museum.

I'm obviously volunteering at the museum to help raise money for the Dueling Dinosaurs, another big exhibit that we're gonna attract to the museum. Working with Ann[e] Smith, one of the former board Chairs, she and I are gonna host a luncheon at the museum in September to bring back a lot of the former board members, former advisory commission members, um, that had been involved in the museum. We want them to, kind of, re-engage with what's happening at the museum and there are a lot of great things happening at the museum - the Citizen Science Initiative is one, still a lot of research - Lindsay Zanno is doing some great paleontology research. But there's a lot of other natural history research going on.

Then I'm the board of the Kidzu Children's Museum, which is that Blue Marble Museum that I was involved in before I went to the Museum of Natural Sciences. They're in the process of planning a new museum. They're in University Place right now, here in Chapel Hill., And I'm on the Board of the Botanical Garden, North Carolina Botanical Garden - another partner of the Museum of Natural Sciences. Um. And I'm on the board of the Keenan Institute for Science Technology and Math at NC State. And we partnered with Ruben Carbonell who heads up that institute at the museum. The museum took Keenan fellows on our Teacher Treks. And so, I'm continuing the same work that I was doing, just in, um, slightly different roles. Still fundraising, still involved in institutions that care about the environment, STEM fields. Um, and, um, we spend time in Montana in the summertime and do a lot of hiking and fishing and kayaking. So, stay pretty busy.

Brooks: Yeah, sounds like it. And still out-doorsy.

Bennett: Right.

Brooks: As you were.

Bennett: Very much, yeah.

Brooks: Mm-hm. Um, what -- this is kind of a broad question but how do you now define success and how do you think that's changed throughout your career?

Bennett: It's interesting, I never thought much about s -- being successful or, you know, success. Seems like my career was doing a whole series of things that I enjoyed doing. I loved my teaching, and I guess, success in the classroom is when you get kids engaged in their own learning and being successful. Um, I think success in an endeavor like the Museum of Natural Sciences is when you get so many people invested that they think of the museum as their museum.

[02:00:02]

And I remember the, um, the legislature was -- you know, they talk about their museum, the legislators were talking about -- and it is their museum. This is the museum for the people of North Carolina. So, I think success is measure by, obviously exceeding expectations. And also having people invested in making something better for their community. And, so, I think the Museum of Natural Sciences was successful in that. And, um.

Brooks: Do you think -- do you have a different definition or a thought about your -- about you personally in terms of personal success? Which could be either career-wise, or family-wise or just generally?

Bennett: Mm-hm. Um, I guess I just feel like I've been very fortunate that in my career, the progression led to another enriching step to another enriching step. And I'm just very proud to have been part of the success of the Museum of Natural Sciences. And just all the -- and friends with and people that I see regularly now that are just so proud of what they accomplished. And you know, what together we all accomplished. It's just, it's amazing, and so, um, and you know, all of that has been, uh, with the support of Walter and my kids and it's pretty cool when you can take your grandchildren into a place that you were so instrumental in helping be successful for them to come and see. They call me BeBe, Come see BeBe's museum. That's pretty cool.

Brooks: So, they know that you were the director --

Bennett: Oh, yeah.

Brooks: -- and that you were part of it all?

Bennett: Yep, yep.

Brooks: That's great. Is there any, um, this is kind of a cheesy question but I'm gonna ask it anyway. Any experience -- or any advice that you'd give to people - broadly, or

women who are trying to make it in their career - any advice that you think is essential?

Bennett: Um, I would just say follow your passion, follow what you're interested in. Follow what you know. That, um -- and make sure that you get the background that you need, the education you need to go on to the next step. I remember Freda Nicholson, she was the director of Discovery Place, and I was telling her that I was thinking about going back and getting a graduate degree, um, going back and getting my PhD. And she said, "You need that, Betsy. If you're gonna -- you need to go get that degree." I said, "Okay." So, you know, and I would not have gotten an interview for the Museum of Natural Sciences because they were only interviewing people that had PhDs. So, um, in that sense that was good advice. So, again, you need to get the tools, the education that you need to kind of do what you'd like to do. But I was just fortunate that I got to do the kinds of things that I wanted to do, that I loved, teaching and then having a bigger classroom like the museum. And creating a museum, I mean, how fun is that? Who gets to do that?

Brooks: [laughs] Very cool.

**[02:04:14][End Bennett\_a][start Bennett\_b]**

Brooks: Is there anything that you would have done differently?

Bennett: Oh, I'm sure there are a lotta -- when you look back you think, Oh gosh, did I really do that or. Um, you know, it's hard to think about what it would be like if I had re-written history. I know there was a time when I was considering going on and getting my PhD in physics and that was right after I graduated from Hollins. And was thinking about going to Vanderbilt and going on and getting a PhD and I decided that I needed to get out in the real world. Um. And not continue schooling then and go back at a later date. Um, actually for me I think that was a good decision. Because all this other good stuff happened because of that decision. But I've often wondered what if I'd gone on and gotten the PhD in physics.

I don't think about that very much because I like the way my career progressed the way it did. Because I got to know more about what I really wanted to do. And, um, I'm not sure the opportunity to work in science museums would've opened up - it may have. But that is such a good arena. And I obviously like working in the not-for-profit world so - I think some people forget to think about the not-for-profit world but it's a very rewarding world, whatever field you're in.

Brooks: Great. That pretty much sums up what I have. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you wanna talk about?

Bennett: I think that's a lot. [laughs]

Brooks: Yeah, yes. Um, great. Well - if anything occurs to you I can always --

Bennett: Mm-kay.

Brooks: -- swing back by. Or you can shoot me an email.

Bennett: And I'll just say one other thing that we didn't talk about very much that --

Brooks: Yeah.

Bennett: -- also, was a real education for me was sitting on the school board for six years and having nine of us make a decision. And I guess the main takeaway that I learned from that was that nine minds make better decisions than one. And so, and that's this collaborative, get everybody involved. I mean, 'cause the staff sometimes would override me. I'd say, "We wanna do this and I have this idea." And they'd say, No, but Betsy, this is a better idea. And, uh, and I learned that lesson on the school board. That, you know, when you're making major decisions about how people's children are gonna be in school it's great that you've got nine people. And we all didn't think alike, and that was good too. Because you got all these different perspectives. And so that was another really good experience for me, to learn how - collectively - you can move a major institution forward like that.

Brooks: I think it's amazing too that someone who had your type of position as the director would be willing to listen. You know, like a lot of times we think, well this is the leader of this organization, they have this vision, it's our job to get that vision done.

Bennett: Right.

Brooks: But I think it's really encouraging that there are directors out there like you who'd say, Okay, maybe I don't know everything.

Bennett: Right, and I think a lot of the good directors are like that. Because, you know, a museum is a very complex entity. And most big organizations are. And you have got to listen to your people or you're gonna -- you know, and the -- and there're people like Steve Jobs who, you know, had this incredible vision, and his was kinda the marketing vision and what it all looked like, but he had a whole team of people, and yes, you know, he had a whole team of people that made it work. And, you know, so I think that it takes a village and it takes a team to do something complex. And I really -- and I learned a lot of that from sitting on the school board. And we had a really good leader, Jay Robinson. He was the superintendent then and went on to head up the state school board. Um, but, so I just, you've got to listen to the people around you. 'Cause there's no way that one person is gonna have all the ideas. Something that complex.

Brooks: Okay. Great.

Bennett: So.

Brooks: All right, well I'll go ahead and turn this off if that's okay.

Bennett: Okay.

Brooks: Thank you very much.

**[00:05:18][End Bennett\_b][End Interview]**